

EARTHCARE

SPRING 2020

NORTHWEST



ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD - JOSEPH MAHONEY/AUDUBON PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS

SEATTLE
AUDUBON



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LETTER FROM OUR PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Dear Members,

As you read this issue of *EarthCare Northwest*, Seattle Audubon is crafting a new strategic plan to set the trajectory of our organization through the next three years. While Seattle Audubon’s work will always center on birds and their habitats, we know that people are the reason that Seattle Audubon exists—the birds don’t know we’re working for them! Engaged, passionate people drive Seattle Audubon’s work in urban conservation, environmental education, and community science. The power of thoughtful, compassionate leadership among volunteers and staff is essential to our effectiveness.

In this issue, we celebrate three volunteer leaders who help make Seattle Audubon’s education programs more equitable and inclusive. They are setting the bar for compassionate, inclusive leadership in education programs at Seattle Audubon and in the world beyond our birdy community.

Roniq Bartanen is passionate about inclusivity, diversity, and accessibility and brings her passion to her Seattle Audubon bird walks. **Rebekah Graham** has parlayed the leadership skills she gained during her time in BirdWatch (now Young Birders) into being a leader for equity and inclusion at her university. **Martha Nester** generously stepped up to foster a more equitable experience for a

summer Nature Camp staff member by sharing space in her home last summer.

Each of these volunteers’ actions reflect a commitment to equity, inclusion, and learning how to thoughtfully and effectively welcome new members into our birds-and-nature-loving community.

Seattle Audubon is phenomenally fortunate to have a deep pool of committed and caring people in our corner, and we look to all of you to create a welcoming atmosphere for people who are new to the Seattle area, or to outdoor exploration, group trips, bird and habitat conservation, and birding.

We can’t wait to embark on our new strategic plan with you, and to the work we will accomplish together for birds and nature.

Gratefully,

Christine Scheele
Program Director



BIRD WALK GROUP BY RONIQ BARTANEN



BIRDING WITH OPEN ARMS

By Elizabeth Muntean, AmeriCorps Urban Environmental Educator

On the morning of the first Saturday of the New Year, the sun punched its way through billowing clouds to shine on a huddled group of people decked in hats, scarves, and binoculars on the east edge of Green Lake. Despite my current position at Seattle Audubon, I don’t consider myself an expert on birds or even a birder at all. Edging towards the group through sharp blasts of wind I felt nervous about introducing myself. Then the leader of the walk, Roniq Bartanen, turned to me with a warm smile and an outstretched hand. She conducts a Green Lake Neighborhood Bird Walk every month, excited to share her love for this local birding hotspot and teaching people about the diverse bird life found in urban areas. As more birders joined the group she gathered us in closer, and the freely given smiles and friendly questions eased my nerves. I reached into my backpack to pull out my binoculars to peek at a Bald Eagle, and shared in everyone’s excitement over the Barred Owl recently seen on the other side of the lake.

Roniq facilitated introductions and laid out bird walk guidelines before navigating us onto the path, keeping us clear of jostling joggers, bikers, and dog-walkers. Gadwalls and Northern Shovelers bobbed along the shore and near the old Bathhouse Theater we admired a flock of American Goldfinches flitting about a bare sweetgum.

People walking by asked if we spotted the eagle and paused to join us as we peered up into the trees. Roniq shared her knowledge of how valuable native plants are for bird habitat and conservation. “Birds are a reflection of our world and we have a responsibility to

do everything we can to provide a better environment for them,” she says. “I think birds show us the impact humans have on this planet and how we have the ability to make choices to provide a better home for all of us.”

After some hunting around the conifers next to the boathouse, one member of our group spotted the whitewash covering a pile of fallen leaves. Deep in the crisscrossed boughs of the cedars above sat the hoped-for Barred Owl. With all of our craning necks and excited pointing, passersby grew curious and soon our birding group had tripled in size. Roniq whispered to each new questioning face, guiding their gaze with an outstretched finger, all of us peering in awe at the beauty of a thing with feathers.

The morning spent walking around the lake with Roniq and our group opened my eyes to the hidden lives of birds playing out around us every day. Seattle Audubon hosts several Neighborhood Bird Walks every month. You can find information about them on our website, seattleaudubon.org. If you haven’t had a chance to enjoy the urban bird life of Green Lake, join Roniq’s flock for a morning—it’s well worth the while. She has a strong online presence to check out if you’re looking for beautiful photography, stories, and tips on birding in the city.

Roniq is a fierce advocate for inclusivity and overcoming barriers in the birding world. She is passionate about female birders and works hard to promote them. Follow her on social media to keep up with her efforts in opening doors for naturalists of all kinds.
shebirds.com • [instagram.com/she_birds](https://www.instagram.com/she_birds)

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THE YOUNG BIRDERS PROGRAM

Launching Youth into Environmental Leadership

The Seattle Audubon Young Birders Program brings together teens between the ages of 13–18 who have an interest in birding and conservation. Young Birders are involved in field trips, meetings, outreach activities, and scientific monitoring efforts throughout the school year. Experienced volunteers and naturalists help members learn about Washington’s birds and their place in the environment. Young Birders is a great way for teenagers to explore Northwest ecology and gain naturalist skills. For more information on the Young Birders program visit seattleaudubon.org. To volunteer with the program, email youngbirders@seattleaudubon.org.

BECOMING A BIRDER

By Rebekah Graham

I became a birder crouching in front of the big picture windows in my house, staring at the specks in the sky with my dad’s tiny binoculars. As my obsession with all things avian grew, I saved enough money to buy my own binoculars, and joined Seattle Audubon Society’s high school club: BirdWatch, now known as Young Birders. My passion for birds convinced me to try camping and group travel with other teens. On our first overnight, I remember touching teasel, catching lizards, and stopping for roadside serpentine with the same relish as spotting birds. The volunteers joked that we should rename ourselves “NatureWatch.” BirdWatch nourished my excitement for nature, and changed my preconceived idea of what I could do in the outdoors.

Five years later, I continue to bird and camp around what is now called Washington State. I attend The Evergreen State College, located on the current and ancestral lands of the Nisqually, Cowlitz, and Puget Sound Salish peoples. As a third-year student, I coordinate The Outdoor Program, and lead trips where my guidance requires everything from the gamut of fitting packs to advising people how to poop outdoors. I also manage Evergreen’s Climbing Gym, and am fortunate that this

leadership role has contributed to a more open climbing space for individuals of all gender identities. In my academic life, I’ve been taking a mixture of sciences and humanities. I’m hoping to synthesize my studies to reflect an understanding of the natural environment within a social context. I know that BirdWatch has influenced some of these choices I’ve made in college, and I look forward to watching the Young Birders program continue a legacy of getting teens outside.

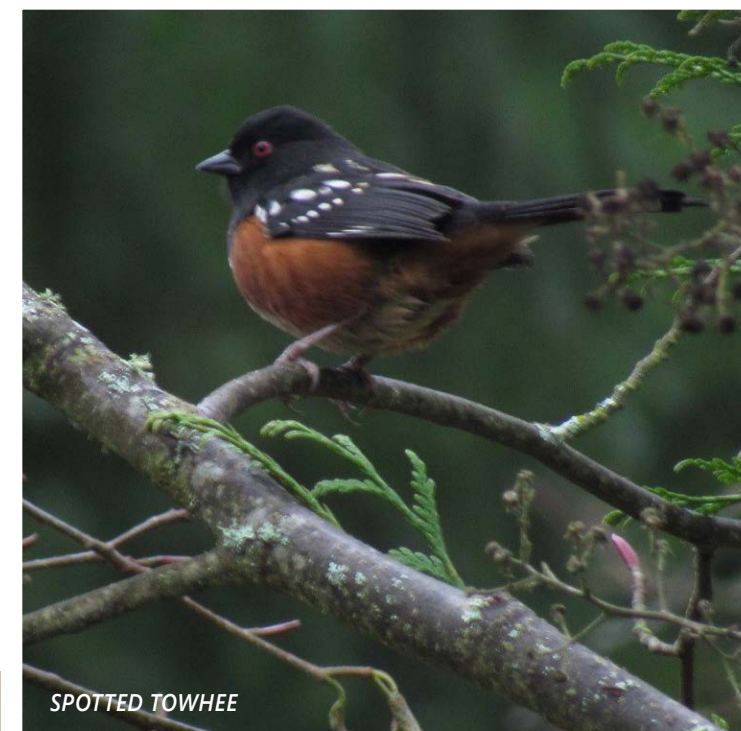


BIRDING WITH ZOE

Zoe Risley-Smyth



Zoe joined the Young Birders in the fall of 2019 and has since participated in the monthly meetings and field trips, as well as engaged in community science and restoration in the Seattle area. Zoe has contributed her excellent photography and illustration skills when documenting her involvement with Young Birders. She took the Spotted Towhee photo during the 2019 Youth Christmas Bird Count.



SPOTTED TOWHEE

“
The Young Birders program has been a really wonderful experience for me. It helps me get outside and take photos of the animals I love while being surrounded by people as interested in birds as I am. I have already learned so much and am excited for what my future in this program holds.



ZOE RISLEY-SMITH ILLUSTRATION

A SUMMER ROOST FOR NATURE CAMP STAFF

By Hanae Bettencourt, Associate Education Manager

Each spring, we hire a team of professional outdoor educators to staff our summer Nature Camp. Many of our applicants are out of state and use the short-term employment opportunity to spend the summer in the beautiful Pacific Northwest. However, it's difficult for young environmental professionals to find short-term rentals and the steep Seattle rental costs can be a deal breaker for many. The Seattle Audubon community stepped in last summer through our new Naturalist Home-stay Program. Some hosted for a night or two while one generous host, Martha Nester, shared her space for the full season with Nature Camp Naturalist Lauren Eno. We asked Martha about her experience.

SEATTLE AUDUBON: Why did you choose to host a Nature Camp Naturalist in your home?

MARTHA NESTER: We have space in the lower level of our house that is mainly used for occasional overnight guests. It seems like a waste of space when we know housing in Seattle is so expensive and in short supply. When Christine said that she had a Naturalist here for the summer needing a place to stay, we said, sure, we would be happy to have her.

SA: How did the home-stay go for you?

MN: Lauren stayed with us for about 10 weeks. She was very independent and quiet so we hardly knew when she was there. She was busy most days.

Lauren was a friendly gal, and easy to get along with. We had her over for dinner a couple times during her stay. Originally we told her that rent would be \$50 per month to cover the cost of electricity and water but we would reduce the rent if she helped a bit with some yard work and caring for our dog. In the end, we did not charge her anything.

SA: What advice would you have for people who might consider doing this in their home?

MN: Set clear guidelines of what you expect.

SA: Would you do it again?

MN: Yes, definitely.

THE NATURALIST HOME-STAY PROGRAM

Volunteer hosts for Seattle Audubon's Home-stay program help remove economic barriers to summer employment for young environmental educators. We've had naturalists hailing from more a dozen states over the past few years.

For more information about how to support this important program and promote the professional development of naturalists from diverse backgrounds, please email Christine Scheele, ChristineS@seattleaudubon.org.

“
Every year, I have had the opportunity to work with amazing naturalists and junior naturalists to bring nature, fun, and adventure to the lives of children across Seattle. Through the laughter and tears, I continue to learn more about teaching, science, art, and myself.

LAUREN ENO

BIRD-A-THON

YELLOW WARBLER - ALEJANDRA LEWANDOWSKI/AUDUBON PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS

REGISTRATION OPENS APRIL 1

It's a sure sign that spring is coming: May is Bird-a-thon month! Bird-a-thon is Seattle Audubon's big spring fundraiser. It's like a walk-a-thon, except you count bird species instead of miles. The challenge is to do it all in one 24-hour period of your choosing, a "Big Day" in May. There are prizes for multiple winning categories, and every dollar you raise in pledges from your friends, family, and colleagues supports birds and the environment.

There's no "right way" to participate in Bird-a-thon. It can be whatever you want it to be. You can plan a statewide adventure or simply watch your feeders for a few hours. You can go out on your own at a park, or plan a road trip with family and friends. Every bird you see, every dollar you raise, helps make Seattle Audubon's local work for birds and nature possible.

Gather your friends, make up a punny team name, and be ready to visit seattleaudubon.org when registration opens April 1. Questions? Contact Anna Dukes at AnnaD@seattleaudubon.org.



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